

Report: Meeting the Career Needs of Plus-50 Adults

Community colleges are reaching out to a growing student population with courses and services to meet the needs of baby boomers age 50 and older, according to a new survey from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

Two-hundred and four colleges completed the survey, which asked respondents to comment on the services available for plus-50 learners, the challenges these programs face, and the practices that have showed promise on their campuses.

In search of flexible schedules and more appealing course offerings, many baby boomers are turning to community colleges to refresh their job skills or retrain for new careers. According to the survey, 93 percent of the colleges with programs for the plus-50 set perceived external demand for courses and services. Of those, 74 percent said the demand was from students themselves.

What's more, 58 percent of colleges with plus-50 programs reported that their offerings focus on training/retraining—a core of courses and student services that support learners over age 50 in returning to, or advancing in, the workplace (see *Figure 1*). Students can take courses to acquire or upgrade a skill, courses that lead to a credential, and customized training. These colleges also typically offer a range of related services, including career workshops and job listings, according to the survey (see *Figure 2*).

The plus-50 adult population is emerging as a viable and growing source of new community college students. Researchers anticipate that over time, colleges will fine-tune their programs further by customizing courses specifically to meet the needs of adults over 50. And some colleges already are taking steps in that direction.

To get there, researchers suggest, colleges must redesign courses and services to address the needs, contexts, and back-

grounds of this population. Career counselors, for example, cannot provide the same advice to plus-50 students that they would to students who are 25, 35, or even 45 years of age. A plus-50 student who wants to reenter or advance in the workforce has very different needs and objectives.

To help colleges better understand how these programs might look, AACC's Plus 50 Initiative has joined with The Atlantic Philanthropies and 15 community colleges across the country to develop programs for learners over 50. Focused on learning, training/retraining, and volunteering, each program aims to help plus-50 adults stay engaged in learning, and active in their workplaces and communities.

For more information about the Plus 50 Initiative and how your college can reach out to students over 50, go to plus50.aacc.nche.edu.

Figure 1. Career-Related Courses Offered to Plus-50 Learners

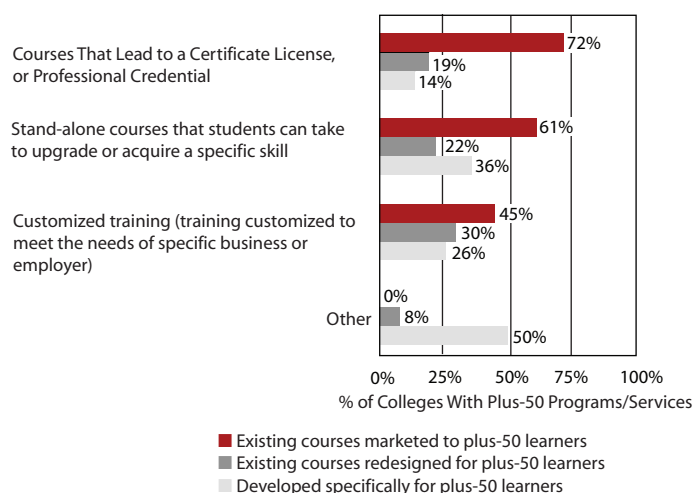
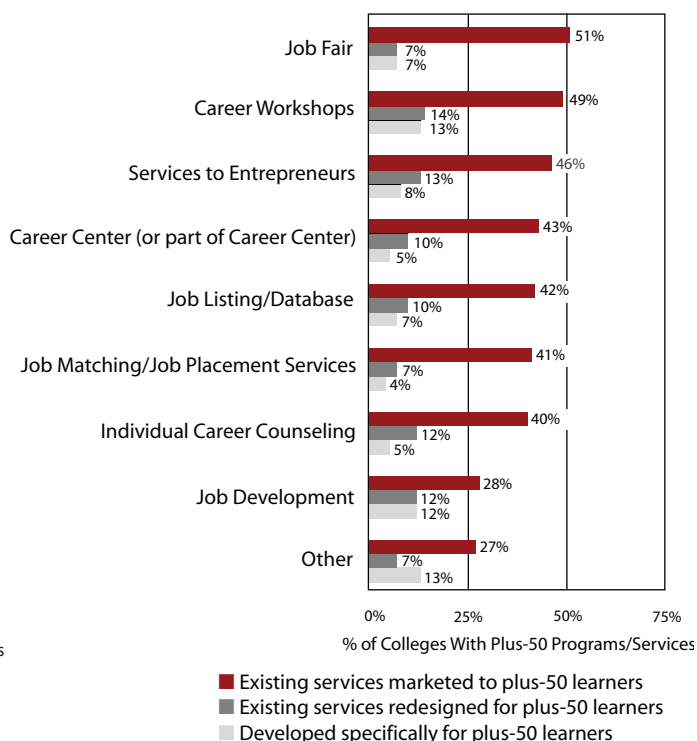


Figure 2. Career-Related Services Offered to Plus-50 Learners



Source: American Association of Community Colleges, Plus 50 Initiative Survey